



The More Things Change

By Stephanie Abbott



I began work in the addiction treatment field in the 1970s. In those days you couldn't fit your phone in your pocket and the electric typewriter

was the new best thing for writers. When a computer appeared in my office it did not have Windows (can you imagine that?) and when I wrote I had to remember keys to get it to do what I wanted. I could never remember what key did what so I had a large cheat sheet that I referred to constantly.

My field was family aspects of addiction and in those long ago days I worked at a treatment center that provided medical help with detox followed by FOUR WEEKS of inpatient, minimum, that was paid for by insurance companies. We had a family program too, for which I was responsible. We didn't know very much about the effects of alcoholism on the children in the family but we were vaguely aware there must have been some, which we thought would get all better if the alcoholic got sober.

Fortunately some researchers and writers began setting us all straight on exactly what the effects on the children can be and no, a sober parent did not automatically undo years of family malfunction. And here is where the National Association for Children of Alcoholics came in. And here is where I still am, proud to be a small part of an organization that knows exactly what its goals are and exactly how to achieve them.

Our goals are directed toward systemic change so that every COA today, this minute, has help and resources and support to deal with the very scary, often chaotic environment that living with active addiction provides. As well, we want to prevent that vulnerable population from also becoming addicted so that the cycle is broken. If you are familiar with our work you know how we go about that task: by educating and providing tools for helping to those who are in contact with children and families, by joining other coalitions to advocate for programs of support for impacted children and families and, by publishing books and facts and DVDs.

The last few years have been productive: international affiliates who have been carrying the message in their own countries, a curriculum for seminary students so that they can be more helpful to families in their work, a greater focus on children in the foster care system, and training provided for those who work with children.

We are in the process of development for an initiative to support military families and their children who are affected by addiction as well as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. We continue to form new partnerships with other organizations who share our goals so that we can strengthen our agenda with a collective voice. Our president and many of the board members and former board members are training here and overseas, working with professionals who affect the lives of children.

The work is exciting because we can see results. It isn't only the laptop I am writing on and the cell phone that

goes everywhere that is part of the change. Some children are getting the message in schools and scouting, church and synagogue, that if their parent is drinking or drugging it is not the child's fault, and there are places to get help. We need to reach all those other children who are keeping a painful secret, and who are frightened or worse by the behavior of the adults who should be protecting them.

We squeeze every cent we have so that nothing is wasted. We are proud that the money goes where it is needed because all our staff and volunteers are motivated and hard working. But we need to make some changes. Rather than send out expensive newsletters four or five times a year as we did for years, we are trying to do more on line and would like to begin sending you our news in emails. For us to change in this way we need you who care about our work to read our Website often (www.nacoa.org) and to send us your email address (to nacoa@nacoa.org). Sign up on our website for our periodic ENews and you will keep up with all our projects. We want YOU to stay tuned. Communication is changing and we will change with it.

We know we can make a difference, and we must because one thing has stayed the same: the environment of addiction is traumatic and harmful for the children.

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